



USAID
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COLOMBIA

April 2008

CASE STUDY

More water, less conflict

USAID support for an innovative water project brings local people together and strengthens the legal economy in the department of Cauca



Photo Credit: ADAM

Infrastructure is almost completed on Colombia's second-largest clean-technology water treatment plant in Rionegro (Cauca)

CHALLENGE: The community of *Rionegro*, in the southern department of Cauca, faced a problem with the water supply due to the increasing amount of internally displaced people (IDPs) moving to the area because of the violence perpetrated by the illegal armed groups. The municipality's water treatment plant was not able to satisfy the needs of the local inhabitants and the newcomers. The lack of water service was creating social tension between the two groups.

INITIATIVE: As a gesture of solidarity towards the new emigrants, in 2003 the people of *Rionegro* decided to include all community members in a project providing potable water to 1,000 families. With USAID funding the community built the storage tanks and the water pipes. However, with the continued growth of the community, in 2007 the leaders of *Rionegro* needed more assistance and approached USAID to request funding under the Alternative Development program. This initiative creates economic opportunities, strengthens local governance and improves the quality of life of marginalized populations to strengthen alternatives to illicit crop production and narco-trafficking.

The community proposed to build a treatment plant that uses highly efficient gravity systems to transport water from a river 15 kilometers away. The total investment of US\$432,000 came from multiple sources: USAID (66%), the municipal government (23%) and the community itself (11%). This cost-sharing agreement is common with USAID projects in Colombia.

RESULTS: Colombia's second largest water treatment plant using clean technology will be fully operational in just a few months. Thanks to the plant, 8,000 people – the entire population of *Rionegro* – will have access to clean water and 1,216 families (941 vulnerable and 275 IDP) will benefit directly from the project. Moreover the project has left a tangible legacy by resolving local problems and by uniting people to achieve a common community goal.